Rastafari: Alternative Religion and Resistance against “White” Christianity

Jérémie Kroubo Dagnini
Rastafari: Alternative Religion and Resistance against “White” Christianity

Jérémie Kroubo Dagnini

Introduction

Since the early sixteenth century, the history of Jamaica has been associated successively with slavery, Christian Evangelization, colonialism and neocolonialism, which gave rise to numerous revolutions, riots and various other forms of social unrest. Black Jamaicans have always lived in a constant state of resistance, a mentality that gave birth, in the early thirties, to a Jamaican religion called Rastafari. Besides studying the roots and symbolism of Rastafari, my paper is aimed at defining the Rasta movement as a religion born as a legitimate response to oppression and Christian Evangelization. In other words, my work examines Rastafari as a Pan-African and Afrocentric version of “White” Christianity.

1. The Roots of Rastafari

1.1. The Period of Christian Evangelization: Ethiopianism and the Idealization of Africa

The Rastafari religion takes its origins from Ethiopianism, an ancient ideological matrix, created from and around the name Ethiopia originating in black worlds. According to Historian George Albert Shepperson, an authority on the history of Black Diaspora, it was inspired by the “Ethiopian references in the Bible which had a liberatory promise and which, when contrasted with the indignities of plantation bondage, showed the black man in a dignified and humane light” (Shepperson 1968: 249). Indeed, forty-five
references to Ethiopia are listed in the Bible, most of them appearing in the Old Testament such as: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Ps. 68: 31), “Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? Saith the Lord” (Amos 9: 7) and “Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite” (Nah. 3: 9). It must be stressed that for Ethiopianists, the name “Ethiopia” had a much broader meaning than the East African country — then referred to as Abyssinia — and alluded to the whole African continent. It should be added that references to Egypt — seven hundred eighty-six in total — were also significant for Ethiopianists who saw the Ethiopian throne as “a connecting link to the ancient Israelite rulers, Egypt as a cradle of civilization, and Africa in general as a primordial homeland” (Johnson-Hill 1995: 14).

Thus, in South Africa and North America, Ethiopianism emerged rather late, in the late nineteenth century to be exact. On the other hand, in Jamaica, it appeared a century earlier, with the introduction of Black Jamaicans to the Bible to be exact. African-Americans George Lisle (or Liele), Moses Baker and George Lewis, emancipated slaves who had fled to Jamaica following the outbreak of the American War of Independence, pioneered this Afro-centered religious trend on the island (Chevannes 1994: 18). Indeed, they were really influenced by the biblical references to Africa and they tried, as much as they could, to proselytize the Jamaican slaves, introducing them by the way to the Bible. Through their speeches and actions, they paid tribute to Africa and emphasized the greatness of Africans; George Lisle (1750-1820), for example, founded the Ethiopian Baptist Church in 1784 and contributed to uplifting black people, associating Africa and its people respectively with the Promised Land and the Elect people, the true Jewish people descending from King Solomon and Makeda Queen of Sheba. They paved the way for people like English Baptist minister and slavery abolitionist William Knibb and Reverend Robert Gordon, one of the first Black Jamaican Anglican priests.

In 1839, William Knibb (1803-1845), despite his European descent, created the Baptist Herald and Friend of Africa, a weekly newspaper giving the newly emancipated slaves a voice of their own and inspiration to improve their living conditions. As for Reverend Gordon (1836-1885), his words might have been taken from a speech of Marcus Garvey, except that they were delivered in 1875, namely twelve years before the one Rastafarians consider a prophet was born:

“Some people...are ashamed to own their connection with Africa, but this should not be, since it must be admitted, that she once held the most prominent and influential position in the world, and that from her, thro’ Greece and Rome, the British Nation received the first elements of civilization” (in Stewart 1983: 280).

In reality, the Ethiopianist ideology, which in a way advocated the purity and greatness of Africans, constituted a response to “White” Christianity which conveyed the image of a primitive, pagan and hideous Africa as the following Bible verse implies: “I am black, but comely” (Cant. 1: 5 emphasis added), the conjunction “but” stressing an incompatibility between black skin and beauty. This developing African consciousness gave rise to numerous Pan-African preachers who were of significant importance in early-twentieth-century Jamaica.
1.2. The Pan-African Preachers in Early-Twentieth-Century Jamaica

Doctor, pastor, journalist, politician and great orator Joseph Robert Love (1835 or 1839-1914), originating from the Bahamas, was a key figure in Pan-Africanism between 1890 and 1914 chanting “Africa for the Africans” (in Chevannes 1994: 38). Love was very proud of his negritude and his African roots, and founded two of the main vehicles for Pan-African and anticolonial ideas of his time: the journal Jamaica Advocate (1894-1905) and the Pan-African Association launched in 1901 in association with another Pan-Africanist from Trinidad H. Sylvester-Williams.

In his rich historical and ethnographic work on the roots of the Rastafari movement, Professor Barry Chevannes also mentioned Isaac Uriah Brown, Prince Shrevington and “Warrior Higgins,” three religious street preachers who kept alive consciousness about Africa among the urban and rural poor in the early twentieth century (Chevannes 1994: 38). These people paved the way for Robert Athlyi Rogers who, in the twenties, founded an Afrocentric religion, the Afro Athlican Constructive Church, which preached self-reliance and self-determination for Africans. Among other things, Rogers saw Ethiopians — namely Africans — as the chosen people of God and proclaimed Marcus Garvey an apostle. Between 1913 and 1917, he wrote the Holy Piby, also known as “The Blackman’s Bible,” first published in 1924. The Holy Piby includes rules of conduct, religious doctrines, references to Ethiopia and Egypt as well as to apostles, saints and God, whom are depicted as being black. In 1926, this “sacred” book was followed by the publication of The Royal Parchment Scroll of Black Supremacy, written by Reverend Fitz Balintine Pettersburgh who described it as “Ethiopia’s Bible-Text” (Johnson-Hill 1995: 15). These two books, which were banned in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands in the middle and late twenties, are today recognized by many Rastafarians as primary source.

However, Alexander Bedward (about 1859-1930), a great healer with followers all over Jamaica as well as in Cuba and Panama, was certainly the most famous preacher of the time. He virulently denounced the oppression of Blacks in Western societies and taught his people the Black revolution. Among other things, he explained to his followers how, in the nineteenth century, the two Jamaica’s National Heroes Sam Sharpe and Paul Bogle rebelled against the White Establishment standing up for their rights at the risk of their life. Bedward was many times arrested for his subversive activities — in April 1921, he and eight hundred of his followers marched to the city, in passing assaulting some people including a census officer — and sent to the psychiatric hospital where he died in November 1930. According to Professor Chevannes, “[h]e led his followers directly into Garveyism by finding the appropriate charismatic metaphor: Bedward and Garvey were as Aaron and Moses, one the high priest, the other prophet, both leading the children of Israel out of exile” (Chevannes 1994: 39).

1.3. Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940): The One Who Broke the Prophecy

The different preachers mentioned above paved the way for Marcus Garvey who remains today a strong symbol of Pan-Africanism with his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), his Black Star Line, his weekly newspaper The Negro World, his magazine The Black Man, his People’s Political Party (PPP) and finally his back-to-Africa...
movement. Among his main objectives, Marcus Garvey wanted to restore black people’s dignity which slavery and colonization had tried to degrade. He wanted that Blacks stop thinking they were inferior beings and that they acquire knowledge, technical and financial means so as to free themselves from the yoke of white people. Furthermore, following the examples of the USA, the UK and other European countries, he promoted the establishment of a powerful African Empire for and governed by Africans, and put forward his person for the position of the eventual head of Africa. Inspired by Joseph Robert Love, Garvey advocated “Africa for the Africans” (in Blaisdell 2004: 165). Among his various activities, Marcus Garvey was a businessman, a politician, a writer, a poet, an orator and a religious preacher. Indeed, he showed great respect for the Bible and often used quotations from the Holy Book in his speeches, his favourite one being “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Ps. 68: 31). Garvey believed in a Black God, the “God of Ethiopia” as he used to call him, and promoted an Afrocentric version of Christianity. He often referred to Ethiopia, Egypt and Africa in his numerous speeches and sermons, and moreover became inadvertently associated with the Rastafari religion when he once reportedly declared: “Look to Africa, for the crowning of a Black King; He shall be the Redeemer.” Indeed, when on 2 November 1930, Ras Tafari Makonnen was made Emperor of Ethiopia, taking the name of Haile Selassie I, Garvey was immediately seen as a prophet by his followers. Even more, his Pan-African actions and speeches coupled with his prophecy resulted in the fact that some of them saw him as the reincarnation of Moses about to bring exiled Africans back to their Promised Land: Africa. Other parameters reinforced this idea of him being Moses reborn such as his middle name Mosiah, “being suggestive of a cross between Moses and Messiah” (Chevannes 1994: 39), and the statements about him made in the Holy Piby: “an apostle of the Lord God for the redemption of Ethiopia and her suffering posterities” (1924; Rogers 2003: 55) and “one of the great prophets sent to redeem the African race” (1924; Rogers 2003: 10). Leonard Percival Howell, Robert Hinds, Archibald Dunkley and Joseph Nathaniel Hibbert were the first to believe in Marcus Garvey’s prophecy and to consider Haile Selassie I the returned Messiah, the Christ, and by extension God. Therefore, they became the first Rastafarians or Rastas. As for Garvey, he became one of the founding fathers of the Rastafari movement, although he never presented himself as a prophet or a Rasta.

1.4. Leonard Percival Howell (1898-1981): The First Rasta

The theological roots of Rastafari can be traced to the independent preachers Leonard Percival Howell, Robert Hinds, Archibald Dunkley and Joseph Nathaniel Hibbert, whom, in the early thirties, were the first to establish the claim that Ras Tafari Makonnen, the newly crowned Emperor of Ethiopia who took the name of Haile Selassie I, was God. These four men preached, among other things, the divinity of Haile Selassie I, Black pride, Black freedom and the return of the Black Diaspora to Africa. Like most of the first preachers inspired by Ethiopianism and Pan-Africanism, these Rasta pioneers felt more comfortable talking with the mass of the people in the streets than making ceremonious speeches shut away in their Church. Nonetheless, they all had their own congregation over which they reigned with a charismatic authority. However, among these early Rastas, Howell was by far the one who played a critical role in the development of the Rastafari religion with his Pinnacle community.
Leonard Percival Howell spent most of his youth — from 1912 to 1932 — overseas. He lived among other things in New York, in the midst of an upsurge of garveyism and marxism, and Panama, a place where there were a great intermixture of ideas and nationalities. Rasta ideology began to take shape in his mind during his stays abroad and he decided to spread it on his return to Jamaica in 1932. Once back home, accompanied by some of his followers, he started spreading the Rastafarian message across the island, preaching the superiority of the Black race and the divinity of Haile Selassie I, the returned Messiah to earth. His mission was financed by the selling of pictures of the Emperor as passports back to Ethiopia; he allegedly sold five thousand pictures of Selassie at one shilling each (Hill 2001: 30). He also collected funds treating sick people coming to him for miracle cures. During an interview I conducted with Professor Chevannes in November 2006, he provided me with interesting information on this latter point:

“He was a sort of guru and led a rather mystical life; mystical in the sense that he was known as a mystical sort of man. At one point, he had an office on Duke Street or East Street, one of the streets where you found a lot of lawyers and other professionals. And they spoke of him as being a doctor, a medicine man who used to wear a stethoscope around his neck. So he had a little clientele, people coming consulting him. That was the pre-Pinnacle time.”

This period can be considered the genesis of the Rasta movement.

Howell was a charismatic and mystical person as well as great orator often described as a megalomaniac. But he was also considered a subversive element and a “con man” by the colonial authorities who arrested him several times. Between 1934 and 1939, he was imprisoned for three years including one year at the Bellevue Mental Hospital — like Alexander Bedward earlier. Once released, he decided to retreat to the countryside and established his own commune. Thus, in November 1940, Howell officially founded the Ethiopian Salvation Society, in the hills of St. Catherine, five miles from Sligoville, on a property of some 485 acres known as Pinnacle. Immediately, hundreds of men, women and children, then known as Ras Tafarites or the followers of Haile Selassie, found refuge at Pinnacle which became the very first Rasta community.

Pinnacle was a kind of reclusive community, accessible only by foot and hidden from the public. There, Rastas lived peacefully in accordance with their interpretation of the Bible. They planted crops, reared cattle, farmed the land and so on. There was a recreational life too in the sense that Rastas often gathered to play Kumina drums brought from St. Thomas. Howell, also know as the “Gong,” served as the supreme chief and was said to exert a lot of discipline within the community. Pinnacle was partly financed through the growth and selling of marijuana, the holy herb also known as ganja, which had become the focal point of all their rituals. Indeed, Rastas developed the practice of smoking at Pinnacle. The wearing of Dreadlocks, on the other hand, became institutionalized in the slums of Kingston later in the late fifties. At its peak, Pinnacle’s membership is said to have numbered “forty-five hundred” (1999; Lee 2003: 167). It is useless pointing out that Howell and his community irritated the colonial government. Thus, Pinnacle gradually became the target of police raids until it was completely destroyed in June 1958. Some members of the community, including Howell, took refuge in Tredegar Park — just a few miles down Pinnacle —, others in Wareika Hills, but “an estimated two thousand of its residents took refuge in Kingston [which contributed to spreading the religion through Jamaican society]. Ironically, the Jamaican police had succeeded only in spreading the ‘Rasta Menace’ they were trying to suppress” (1999; Lee 2003: 4). Howell, after several
stays at the Bellevue Hospital, became isolated from the Rasta movement, spending the rest of his life anonymously, commuting between Tredegar Park and some West Kingston ghettos. He died on 12 February 1981, just two months before Bob Marley’s death.

Photographie 1. The remains of Pinnacle

SOURCE : JÉRÉMIE KROUBO DÂGNINI.

1.5. Haile Selassie I (1892-1975): Jah

On 2 November 1930, Ras Tafari Makonnen — “Ras” meaning “head/governor” and “Tafari” meaning “the one who is feared/awed” in Amharic — was made Emperor of Ethiopia. He took the name of Haile Selassie I — “Power of the Trinity” — and was proclaimed Negusa Negast — “King of Kings.” His other official titles included Lord of Lords, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah and Elect of God. Last but not least, Ras Tafari was believed to be a direct descendant from King Solomon of Israel and the Black Queen of Sheba (1936; Rogers 1982: 25). Thus, Garvey’s prophecy, the coronation of Ras Tafari and his impressive titles and lineage — not to mention the fact that at the time Ethiopia was the only African country to be free from colonialism — were seen by the first Rastas like Leonard Percival Howell as being confirmation of the return of the Messiah mentioned in the prophetic Book of Revelation: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1: 8; emphasis added). Haile Selassie was then seen as the returned Messiah to earth, the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, and by extension God or in Rasta speech, Jah, a name deriving from Hebrew Jehovah (1980; Cassidy et Page 2002: 240). Eventually, his 1966 state visit to Jamaica gave a marked boost to the movement on the island. Moreover, Ras Sydney Lloyd Da Silva, Chairman of the Rastafarian Centralization Organization, was full
of emotion and nostalgia when he recalled this event during an interview I conducted with him in August 2006:

“We were told the day before, 21 April, that His Majesty is in Guyana. So, we started to prepare ourselves to go and meet the King, but I didn’t know him at that time. I was carrying the faith but I didn’t know His Majesty, I had never seen him. So, this was a great thing for me, you know? So, what happened that day when I go to greet him, there was a great number of young people at the airport and...I saw this likkle man and...he’s the biggest thing I’ve seen in my life. I’m 72 years now and that’s the biggest thing I feel into my bones. He was a likkle man and what was nice about it is that when I saw him coming out of the plane, it was a miracle! Miracle! You know, my bredrins and the elders we were underneath that plane trying to light the chalice and you know there was this fire with the plane...Man, it was a great day! It was a day of joyfulness, it was a day of sadness; some people cry, some people smile, it was a great day! There were hundreds of thousands of people. And from the airport to Kings House, the road was crowded. You can’t imagine that, yeah man! When he came out and saw the crowd...the crowd saw him and rush to the plane and he could not come down the steps. So he just called Mortimo Planno who had visited him in Africa and told him that he wanted to come down and Planno said ‘People! I want him to come down.’”

Although in 1967 Haile Selassie denied being the reincarnation of the Messiah during an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation the majority of Rastas has never kept worshiping him, even after his death in 1975.

2. Rasta Symbolism

2.1. Religious Symbolism

Generally speaking, the Bible is the reference book for most Rastafarians who try to live in accordance with their interpretation of its Holy writings. To a lesser extent, they also refer to the Holy Piby and other so-called sacred texts. Thus, being human beings and created in the image of God as the following verse states: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him” (Gen. 1: 27), the Rastas believe in a Black God, the God of Ethiopia embodied in Haile Selassie I. The numerous references to Ethiopia and Egypt in the Bible confirm their belief that God is Black. Such a belief challenges Christianity which advocates a white image of God through the numerous paintings, drawings and statues depicting Jesus Christ with white skin, blond hair and blue eyes. Besides this particular point, fervent Rastas follow rules of conduct stipulated in the Bible. Hence, they do not eat pork according to the following verse: “And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcasse” (Deut. 14: 8); they do not drink alcohol as it is specified in this other verse: “Do not drink wine nor strong drink” (Lev. 10: 9); they smoke ganja — “[...] and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22: 2) —; and they grow beard and dreadlocks — “They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard” (Lev. 21 :5) and “[...] he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow” (Num. 6: 5). By following these precepts for life, which are not followed by the majority of Christians, Jamaican Rastas again position themselves against “White” Christianity. Indeed, by not eating pork, Rastas get closer to Islam and accordingly Africa, distancing themselves from Christianity.
and therefore from the ones who introduced this religion to Jamaica, namely Westerners. By smoking ganja instead of drinking alcohol, they clearly rebel against Christian Eucharist. In addition, this practice clearly echoes their African cultural heritage. Indeed, it is common knowledge that hallucinogenic plants such as iboga and voacanga have been used for centuries in traditional African rituals, in Gabon (in Central Africa) in particular. Finally, by growing long black dreadlocks, Rastas not only defy Jesus Christ’s blond straight hair, but they also break with Western social conventions which tend to recommend short and straight — or straightened — hair. Dreadlocks metaphorically pay tribute to African “roots” too. To sum up, African Emperor Haile Selassie I, natural food called Ital food in Dread talk, ganja and dreadlocks are strong religious symbols defying Christian beliefs.

Photographie 2. A Rasta smoking ganja with a pipe called chalice in reference to the Holy Chalice in Christian tradition

2.2. Musical Symbolism

Drum and chant play an important role in the Rasta movement and are essential elements of Rasta gatherings — called grouchons in Rasta talk — along with ganja. Indeed, Rastafarians, who proclaim their African identity, see the drum as a link with Africa and the sound it produces as its heartbeat. Like their African ancestors, they also use it as a means of communication between the living and the dead. As for chant, it enables them to melodiously praise Jah and to pay tribute to the Promised Land: Africa.
2.3. Ethiopian symbolism

Two key symbols could be mentioned in this part. The first one is the Lion of Judah which is an important Rastafarian symbol of Emperor Haile Selassie I. Indeed, the lion is the symbol of the Tribe of Judah, Haile Selassie’s one. It should be emphasized that in Rasta symbolism, the dreadlocks also represent the Lion of Judah’s mane. The second symbol is the Ethiopian flag with its three well-known colors: green representing the fertile lands of the country, yellow representing the wealth of Ethiopia and the red color being for the blood shed in the fight for freedom and in defense of the country. These three colors are seen as strong Pan-African colors.

Photographie 3. Ras Sydney Lloyd Da Silva wearing a Lion of Judah pendant as well as a green, yellow and red scarf around his neck

Source: Jérémie Kroubo Dagnini

2.4. Africa vs. Babylon

Africa and Ethiopia are the backbone of the Rastafari religion. Indeed, Rastas regard the former Emperor of Ethiopia as Jah, Marcus Garvey as a prophet and Ethiopia as the Promised Land. Like early Ethiopians, Jamaican Rastafarians associate themselves with the Jews enslaved in Babylon during their first exile from Israel in the sixth century Before Christ. Thus, they preach the return to their homeland Ethiopia, but Babylon must collapse before expecting the eternal rest in Africa. In reference to the Bible’s pagan city of Babylon (Rev. 18: 2), which in ancient times was the great nation poisoned by arrogance, corruption and decay, “Babylon” is the Rastafarian term referring to the white political power structure which has been holding black people down for centuries.
through enslavement, poverty, inequality and other trickeries. Thus, the concepts of Africa and Babylon play a central role in Rastafarian ideology, the first one symbolizing the good, the second the evil.

2.5. Dread Talk

Rastas did not invent Jamaican Patois which emerged naturally when populations of different regions of the world --- Taino Amerindians, Spaniards, West Africans, Central Africans, British people, Indians etc. ---, with distinct languages were forced into contact. Patois, which began as a pidgin, emerged in order to provide some level of cross-group communication. It appeared early in Jamaican history and phenomenally developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries along with the phenomena of emigration and immigration. However, since the middle fifties, Jamaican Rastas have played an important role in institutionalizing Patois like ganja and dreadlocks. Indeed, they have been creating new syntax, new words and expressions which have become very popular across the island, to begin with the use of the pronoun “I” which stands for “me” and the expression “I and I” which stands for “we;” “I and I” is also an expression referring to the oneness of Jah and every human being. Among other expressions, one could mention “Ital” which stands for “natural;” “gwaan” standing for “going;” “bredrin” standing for “brethren” etc. The uncompromising reggae star Peter Tosh gave rise to famous Rasta expressions too such as: “Asadica” for “America;” “Shitaly” for “Italy;” “Christ-t’ief Come-bust-us” for “Christopher Columbus;” “Crime Minister” for “Prime Minister;” “Damager” for “Manager;” “Hell A” for “L.A.” and “politricks” for “politics.” Rasta speech also known as Dread talk has become a strong symbol against Standard English symbolizing Western imperialism par excellence.

Conclusion

All things considered, the Rastafari religion is clearly a syncretic religion mixing elements of Traditional African beliefs with elements of a Pan-African and Afro-centered version of Christianity, and it obviously challenges Christianity at different levels, to begin with its structure. Contrary to Christianity which is a religion with a well-organized, hierarchical governance structure, the Rastafari movement’s structure is rather anarchical like most animist cults: there is no official governing structure dictating conformity of theology, neither acknowledged Rasta leader as the Pope, nor official baptism etc. Furthermore, Rasta symbols and codes are challenging Christianity too: God is embodied in Jesus Christ for Christians and in Haile Selassie I for Rastas; Christians see Moses as the prophet who led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt while Rastas see Marcus “Mosiah” Garvey as Jamaica’s Redeemer with his back-to-Africa movement; Holy Communion includes bread and wine for Christians and ganja for Rastas; religious music is embodied in Christian harp music on the one hand and in Rasta drumming on the other ---; Christians see Israel as the Promised Land whereas Rastas see Ethiopia etc. Thus, the Rasta movement was visibly born as a response to oppression and “White” Christian Evangelization. In other words, it seems that Christians and Rastafarians mainly differ in their interpretation of the Bible which most of the time is read from a White perspective by the former and from a Black perspective by the latter.
Last but not least, it is essential to emphasize that the general influence of reggae music, from the early 1970’s onwards, and to a lesser extent Jamaican migration have resulted in the worldwide spread of Rastafari: in the rest of the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, the USA, Asia, the Pacific region and other parts of the world.

ABSTRACTS

Since the early sixteenth century, the history of Jamaica has been associated successively with slavery, Christian Evangelization, colonialism and neocolonialism, which gave rise to numerous revolutions, riots and various other forms of social unrest. Black Jamaicans have always lived in a constant state of resistance, a mentality that gave birth, in the early thirties, to a Jamaican religion called Rastafari. Besides studying the roots and symbolism of Rastafari, my paper is aimed at defining the Rasta movement as a religion born as a legitimate response to oppression and Christian Evangelization. In other words, my work examines Rastafari as a Pan-African and Afrocentric version of “White” Christianity.

Dépues le début du seizième siècle, l’histoire de la Jamaïque a successivement été associée à l’esclavage, l’évangélisation, la colonisation et le néo-colonialisme, ce qui a engendré de nombreuses révolutions, émeutes et autres formes d’agitation sociale. Les Jamaïcains noirs ont toujours vécu dans un état de résistance, une mentalité qui a donné naissance, au début des années 1930, à une religion jamaïcaine appelée rastafari. Le but de cet article n’est pas seulement d’étudier les origines et le symbolisme de rastafari, mais également de définir le mouvement rasta comme une religion née en réponse légitime à l’oppression et l’évangélisation. En d’autres termes, cette étude analyse rastafari comme une version panafricaine et afrocentrique du christianisme “blanc”.

INDEX

Geographical index: Afrique, Jamaïque
Keywords: bible, ethiopianism, evangelization, Marcus Garvey, Leonard Howell, pan-africanism, rastafari
Mots-clés: bible, éthiopianisme, évangelisation, Marcus Garvey, Léonard Howell, panafricainisme, rastafari

AUTHOR

JÉRÉMIE KROUBO DAGNNINI
Département d’Études anglophones de l’Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3, Doctorant, jeremiekroubo@hotmail.com